



Thoughtful Grooming - How to Improve Health, Fitness and Relationship!

by Stefanie Reinhold



You can enhance your horse's wellbeing, bodily functions, fitness and wellness through grooming.

We all know what it feels like when we are approached simply with a kind intention, without expectations, goals or agendas. It's soothing, relaxing and comforting. Often, when we interact with our horse, there is an agenda. Training, exercising, and practicing mean expectations, goals and measurable successes. But there are also those other special times, where we just spend time together with our horse to enjoy each other's company or show affection and appreciation.

Grooming can be one of those elements in your interaction with your horse that is just filled with kind intention, care and bonding. But that's not all: You also enhance your horse's wellbeing, bodily functions, fitness and wellness - if you know the 'tricks of the trade'. In this article, we'll focus on grooming the horse's coat. There is a simple and effective 4-step process that guarantees success.

Here are the 'how and why' of thoughtful grooming, in 4 basic steps:

With all the following steps, always work in the direction of hair growth, starting at the top of the neck, working towards the hind end. Pay attention to the horse's reactions: ears back, fearful look, eyes half-closed, twitching of the skin, or flinching, which will indicate either pleasure or concern. Adjust your pressure accordingly. Always start on the side (left or right) of the horse where she is less worried.

Note: Always groom before your ride! The increased blood circulation will help him warm up faster and perform better.

Step 1 - Currying



The 'Rub Down' effect: Stimulate blood flow, help release toxins, create body awareness, enhance immune system, relieve stress, show affection (in horse language), scratch an itch, become aware of sensitive areas

The tool: A sturdy rubber (NOT metal or plastic!) curry, soft enough to bend in your hand

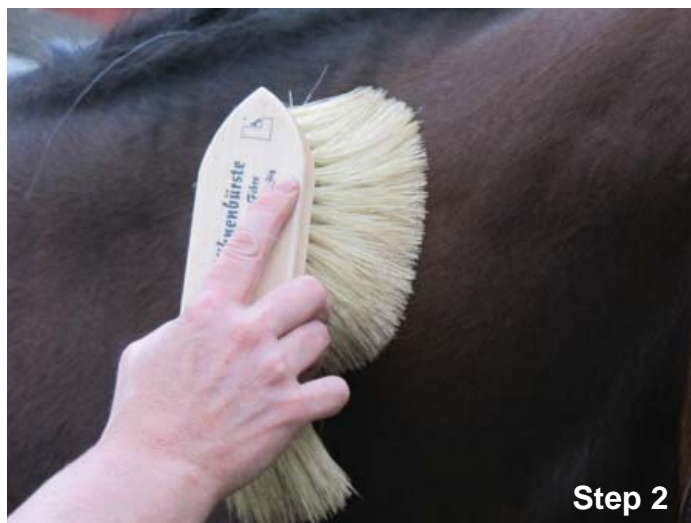
The visible goal: Loosen dirt, sand, dust and debris or mud and bring it to the surface of the horse's coat.

The technique: Rub in circular motion over muscled areas, with care over bony areas. Work in the direction of hair growth from head to hind end. Carefully work on legs up to the knee. Work areas the horse finds pleasurable a bit longer. Knock the rubber curry against the wall or ground to discard dirt several times during the process.

The 'NO-NOs': Do not use a metal curry or plastic curry due to sharp edges and micro-cracks that pull out hair. Avoid or be very gentle on bony areas like point of hip or shoulder.

Did you know?

Every hair has a 'hair erector muscle' that makes hair stand up or lie flat. By grooming, you relax this muscle, enabling the hair to lie flat and create a shiny coat!



Step 2 - Flicking

The 'Sweeping' effect: Lift dirt and dust from the surface of the horse's skin and sweep it to the surface of the horse's coat and away. Remove larger dirt particles and clean the horse's coat, increase blood circulation, help release toxins, promote relaxation

The tool: A natural plant fiber brush (e. g. rice or cactus fiber) with long, flexible bristles that are soft enough to feel good. Avoid stiff, scratchy brushes.

The visible goal: Remove the coarser, bigger dirt particles, see dirt lifted up to and off of the surface of the coat, do first smoothing and cleaning of the coat.

The technique: Work in short 'flicking' broom strokes, as if using a corn broom to sweep the barn aisle. Follow up with longer strokes. Clean the brush every few strokes by stroking it against the rubber curry; then knock the rubber curry against wall or floor. You can work this brush down the legs as well. Some horses like this brush around their head and on their face, as long as you brush in the direction of hair growth. Experiment and see what your horse likes!

The 'NO-NOs': Stiff, scratchy brushes will not do the job and do not feel good to your horse. Plastic bristles collect the natural oils on your horse's skin and coat, then attract dirt and reapply it back to the horse.



Step 3 - Finishing

The 'Clean and Smooth' effect: Remove remaining dirt particles, smooth coat, distribute natural oils from your horse's skin through the coat, create shine, promote relaxation

The tool: A good quality soft brush made of horse hair with a bristle density that still flicks (not too dense) and a bristle length that doesn't invite bending (not too long)

The visible goal: Remove the finer dirt particles and create a shiny, smooth coat.

The technique: Work with long strokes in the direction of hair growth. Clean the brush against the rubber curry every couple of strokes, then knock dirt out of rubber curry. Use this brush to clean the head and face. Repeat for added shine!

The 'NO-NOs': Synthetic brushes do not clean your horse or bring on the shine (see above). They create static and are disliked by most horses.

Step 4 - Wiping down

The 'Glossing' effect: Remove last particles of fine dust, smooth



the coat to enable it to reflect light, pamper and stroke your horse all over and make him feel special!

The tool: I have successfully used cloth diapers, lambskin mittens (auto cleaning type) and luxurious goat hair brushes. Anything that's soft and non-static will do. See what your horse likes...

The visible goal: Bring out the shine, and have a relaxed and pampered-feeling horse!

The technique: Simply wipe gently in hair growth direction, working from head to hind end. Work calmly and deliberately with focus on making your horse feel good. Shine comes with it!

The 'NO-NOs': Do not work against the hair growth direction. Don't rush!



In a nut-shell: Grooming is not just a chore. Thoughtful grooming enhances your horse's wellbeing, fitness, and emotional and physical health while it helps you create a stronger bond with your horse. And - almost as a 'side effect' - it will make your horse look like the shining star he or she is!

Be well and enjoy your horse! 🍷🍷

About the author:

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